

June 24, 1943, letter from Willis Laurence James to B.A. Botkin, including June 15, 1943, informational letter from James to performers in festival

The Fort Valley State College Fort Valley, Georgia June 24, 1943

Dr.B.A. Botkin Assistant in Charge Archive of American Folk Song Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.

Dear Dr. Botkin:

Thank you for your recent letter. Yes, I received the needles, and I apologize for not having mentioned that fact in my letter. I am glad you realized that I had the needles. At the time I wrote you my mind was running along different channels.

Up to date I have done fairly well in the acquisition of new war songs. I think you will be pleased with my findings. With great effort and patience I have been able to make some rather smooth recordings but the machine which I am using is faulty and of a very elementary design. At present the turntable is giving trouble because of its tendency to rock from side to side, causing a very ludicrous whine along the outer two inches of the record. At first I modified this tendency by moving the needle inward from two to three inches at the outset but the condition lately has increased. I am seeking at the present time to have this fault corrected if I can in this area. Perhaps I might be able to borrow a turntable out of Atlanta or Macon. Anyway, I shall make an effort to do so and continue in the meantime to do what I can. Do not be too alarmed about this because the recordings I have made to date are good, clean and distinct. Fortunately the machine seemed to have gone haywire all at once rather than gradually.

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I am sending you one of the letters announcing our Annual Summer Folk Festival and you will note that I am giving special consideration to your needs.

If you could make arrangements for me to have a Presto machine for this occasion I can get some good things for you. I would like for you to react to this at once so that I may be able to make my plans, in accordance, right away. The matter of getting words to the songs on separate paper is giving some trouble because the people can not always repeat the words without singing them, and frequently when they sing them I am so busy recording that I do not have opportunity to write them down but I think this can be worked out through an assistant.

I have spoken to Dr. Bond in regard to the records that you mentioned. I have not been able to acquire them yet but I have the promise that I may have them. I will be needing some new discs for this and they have been ordered but I will not be able to proceed until they arrive. All of our supplies must be ordered from elsewhere. I cannot acquire anything of this sort in this small town.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours, Willis Laurence James Willis Laurence James Visiting Professor of Music

WLJw Incl.

Recommended by

Send to

Name of city or town

The Fort Valley State College Fort Valley, Georgia June 15, 1943

Dear Friend:

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In years past we have had great times here, singing together, meeting old friends and winning prizes. This year we are not only giving prizes but we are also giving to every single person who takes a part in the festival a very beautiful certificate. These certificates are suitable for framing and will be signed with the State seal and by the president of the college, as well as by the festival director, who happens to be me.

We are also giving prizes of \$20.00, \$15.00 and \$10.00 for the best choirs, and \$20.00, \$15.00 and \$10.00 for the best quartets. This is more than we have ever given before and we are looking to have a great time together. Come and meet your friends and hear some fine singing.

Be sure to have spirituals ready to sing. We do not want you to sing hymns. If you can make up some songs about the War we will give special consideration to them and if they are good we will make records of them and send them to Washington, D.C. Here is your chance to get in the war effort and do something for yourself and at the same time become known in a very lasting way. You may make up a war song about the Negro's part in it, or any way you wish to make it. Remember, you do not have to make up a war song to be in the festival but it will be nice if you can, and we will see that your song is recorded if it is good and send it to Washington.

The festival begins 4:30 P.M. Sunday, August 1, 1943. Be sure to get here by 2:00 P.M. to register.

Inclosed is a card addressed to me. Kindly write on this card if you are coming and mail it back to me at once.

Hoping to see you here soon, I am

Your same good friend, Willis Laurence James Director of the Festival

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